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Rail company makes tax deadline -- barely

By JOEL ELLIOTT

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SENTEINEL JOURNAL Morning Sentinel

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Thursday, February 22, 2007

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WATERVILLE -- Guilford Rail Systems this week spared the City of Waterville the responsibility of owning a rail yard when it paid \$113,000 in real estate taxes two days before the foreclosure deadline.

The railroad company, starting as early as 2001, has had a pattern of waiting as long as possible to pay its property taxes in various parts of Maine, including Waterville, Lewiston and Portland, as well as in Ayer, Mass., according to published reports.

In 2004, Waterville nearly foreclosed on the company's local properties for nonpayment of about \$311,000 in taxes. The city of Portland in 2004 did foreclose on a Guilford property.

The amount Guilford paid on Tuesday was for the company's 2005 real estate taxes; the company still owes an additional \$125,000 in real estate taxes for 2006 and the first quarter of 2007, according to Waterville tax collector Linda Cote.

Waterville had set the foreclosure deadline for Friday.

Of the amount Guilford paid, \$15,000 was in interest. It's a mystery why the company waits so long to pay its taxes, according to city council chairman Don Dufour.

"People pay taxes on time, or they should be paying taxes on time," he said. "Businesses shouldn't be any different. That type of scenario is just not good business."

Dufour said waiting is a risky gamble, since the city is prepared to foreclose on the railroad's 70-odd acres of property if necessary. Guilford owns five parcels of land

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throughout the city, including the Intermodal facility at 55 College Ave.

Guilford president David A. Fink did not return calls placed Wednesday morning to his office. The company also goes by the names of Pan Am Railways and Maine Central Railroad Company.

The company operates railroads in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Vermont and Maine. Its next foreclosure date in Waterville is in February 2008.

Guilford's last-second move to pay its taxes came as a relief, Waterville Mayor Paul LePage said.

"The mayor of Waterville won't be a train conductor," he said, laughing. "We don't want to take it over. We are in the business of collecting taxes, not running businesses."

Reader comments

Sean339 of Wells, ME

Feb 22, 2007 6:24 PM

There's been smoke and fumes "spewing" from Waterville Yard for the past 100+ years. It's nothing new, and it happens in hundreds of other rail yards around the country and around the world. Don't like it? Don't buy a house next to a rail yard. Trust me, the railroad has been there LONG before you were even a twinkle in your father's eye.

Incidentally, Guilford Rail System formally changed its name to Pan Am Railways almost a year ago. Maine Central Railroad? They haven't used that name since 1981.

tunegal of Waterville, ME

Feb 22, 2007 9:35 AM

that College Avenue facility spews out blue toxic fumes up and down the Kennebec River. Writing to Olympia Snow has no influence. Mr. Fink and Guilford does as they wish, while residents are exposed to these fumes with no let-up. Objections are ignored, and meanwhile we have to breathe polluted air from an organization that is always owing taxes. Issues are seldom resolved "for the people" (who pay taxes on-time) but rather, it's the same old story. It's about MONEY, and the little man has No Voice in the matter. As for the EPA..it's just another acronym for do-nothing, and falls into the same category as the United Nations, and yes..the Dept. of Defense, and so-called HOMeland Security. Nobody does anything worth mentioning. With 3,500 US dead in Iraq, and the local train station polluting what's left of our young men, there may come a war someday, and no one will go, from being poisoned in their own hometown.

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